

Wisconsin Ave. 'Canyon' Assailed

By Robert G. Kaiser
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A well-organized group of nearly 70 citizens came to the District Building yesterday to protest a proposed change in the zoning map that they said would turn Wisconsin Avenue nw. into a "canyon."

Thirteen witnesses contributed to a chorus of opposition to the proposed construction of high-rise apartment houses on Wisconsin Avenue between Davis and Fulton Streets. More than 60 residents of nearby areas came to the District Building in a chartered bus to lend moral and audible support.

The property that builder Melvin Gelman wants to use for high-rise apartments is on the east side of Wisconsin Avenue, going up the hill across the street from the Mount Alto Hospital site.

If negotiations now under way are completed successfully, the Soviet Union will use the Mount Alto site to build a new embassy and chancery. The Russians are known to oppose the construction of high-rise apartments across the street for fear they will be used by snooping FBI agents.

Residents of the area near the proposed apartments opposed the buildings on almost every ground but that one.

They seemed primarily concerned yesterday with the possibility of 90-foot buildings going up a hill between them and Wisconsin Avenue, casting shade, dirt and discomfort on all that lay below. "Life would be extremely unpleasant and difficult," said one organizer of yesterday's protest, Mrs. Jean C. Lindsey.

The citizens also argued that the city needs to maintain strong

neighborhoods of single-family houses, and not turn all in-town property over to high-density apartment development.

Joseph L. Miller testified that "middle- and high-rental apartments are available throughout Washington." He said he had personally surveyed the eight apartment houses on Wisconsin Avenue above Mount Alto. "I found that seven of the eight buildings . . . had vacancies, and in the eighth I couldn't find the manager," Miller said.

F. Joseph Donohue, a former District Commissioner (and as such, a former member of the Zoning Commission), represented Gelman at yesterday's hearing. Donohue said, "We can solve the tax problem, we can solve the traffic problem if we build high-rise apartments in the areas that allow people to get to work in a reasonable length of time . . .

There's only one way we can expand, and that's upward."

Gelman's application came on the heels of an unexpected rezoning of the old Zoning Commission last September that allowed a high-rise apartment to be built at Calvert Street and Wisconsin Avenue. That is just below the area being considered at yesterday's hearing.

Yesterday's protesters also asked the Zoning Commission to reopen the Wisconsin and Calvert case.

After hearing the heated citizen opposition, Donohue argued that "zoning is not a popularity contest." He urged the Zoning Commission to rezone the land consistent with the change made in September at Wisconsin and Calvert.

The Commission took the matter under advisement.

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